

Urban Theories Across Borders (UTAB)

Comparing Cities from Southeast Asia and Beyond



IRASEC Doctoral Workshops in Social Sciences and Humanities



Photo credits. Above. Kotagede, Yogyakarta. Below. Thanon Prapokloa, Chiang Mai. Photo by A. Esposito, 2015 and 2022.

Objective

The Research Institute of Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC) launches a series of doctoral workshops in the social sciences and humanities to be organized in partnership with European and Asian universities. These workshops have the objective to foster dialogue and exchange about research on Southeast Asia in the fields of the social sciences and humanities. They aim to encourage comparative and regional research approaches ; facilitate students' exchange, thesis co-tutorship and co-supervision for early career Southeast Asian researchers, especially those who are willing to pursue their studies in France. Under this umbrella, « **Urban Theories Across Borders** » (**UTAB**) is a recurring winter school organized in partnership between the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC), the Faculty of Architecture of Chiang Mai University, the Faculty of Planning and Civil Engineering of Trisakti University, with the doctoral school « City, Transports and Territory » of the University Paris-East. The first edition of this winter school will take place in December 2022.

For whom?

UTAB targets early career researchers — master and PhD students — who aim to pursue knowledge production about cities and urbanization in Southeast Asia from a social sciences perspective. This winter school helps the students to engage with the most recent debates in the urban studies field, provides methodological tools to write and improve research proposals, and initiate the students to urban fieldwork activities.

Why Southeast Asia?

Southeast Asian cities face unprecedented development challenges related to massive, rapid, privately led, urbanization processes. Entangled with conflictive urban politics at various scales, these processes generate pressing management and environmental problems that require contextual urban policies and patterns of governance. In trying to unpack the complexity of these processes, contemporary urban research has developed two divergent avenues of investigation. On the one hand, fundamental research has analyzed the development trajectories of Southeast Asian cities with a solid grounding in the social sciences and postcolonial theory. With few remarkable exceptions, urban researchers have often taken regional boundaries for granted (« Southeast Asian cities » ; « Asian cities »...) without questioning how these boundaries contribute to produce specific but possibly biased types of knowledge. On the other hand, research produced *in* Southeast Asia and *on* Southeast Asia has often been based on architectural and urban design tools. A large number of research works have an applied scope, in that they aim to inform policies, guide investments, and solve management problems. They are mostly case-based, rarely comparative, and take ground on international urban doctrines rather than on contextual urban concepts.

Our main questions

UTAB contributes to fill the gap between fundamental and applied research on Southeast Asian cities. It decentralizes the production of urban knowledge *towards* Southeast Asia and triggers knowledge coproduction *between* and *with* scholars based in Southeast Asian universities. **What are the specificities of cities and urbanization in Southeast Asia? Why do urbanization and urbanism in Southeast Asia have a global interest?** UTAB draws on a solid historical grounding to develop these questions. All while resisting to any form of essentialism about Southeast Asia and urbanism in Southeast Asia, the winter school addresses the relevance and scope of urban concepts shaped with Western or Southeast Asian contexts in mind, and questions how they are useful within and beyond regional borders. In doing so, UTAB contributes to the debate about the utility of area based studies in times of global urbanism.

UTAB 2022 thematic and methodological focus

More specifically, the first edition of UTAB asks : **why is it useful to compare cities in Southeast Asia and beyond ?** This very broad question opens up a series of problems to which young scholars are faced during doctoral studies : how to identify the relevant criteria for comparing cities? Is it possible to develop a comparative approach even within monographies, in order to stress the specificities, or the broader relevance of arguments based on the analysis of just one case study? These questions concern all young scholars in urban studies because, as Jane M. Jacobs (2012)¹ has explained, comparison is a fundamental process of social sciences research. During the last twenty years, comparative urban research has distanced from the systematic identification of similarities and differences that compartmentalized the study of Northern and Southern cities : whilst cities from the North were analyzed through the prism of the « world city theory », cities from the South were mainly considered for the urban management problems allegedly caused by weak planning instruments and management authorities. More recent, relational approaches to urban comparisons have tracked the relations between cities and how they developed through time and space. They have traced the global circulations of practices, concepts, and politics. They have evaluated how international urban concepts (e.g. informality, public space, etc.) are « localized » and granted specific meanings in different contexts.

UTAB 2022 activities

A series of diverse and complementary activities will help the students engaging with comparative urban studies from various thematic and disciplinary perspectives and better locating their theme and research objects within this field. A team of urban researchers will provide **lectures** that will examine the main theoretical and methodological orientations of comparative urban studies. Lectures will also present past or ongoing comparative works and research programs conducted by the urban researchers, who will reflect on their initial expectations, effective outputs, and their limitations. They will also lead **workshops** that will

¹ Jacobs, Jane M. 2012. « Urban Geographies I : Still Thinking Cities Relationally », *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(3) : 412–422.

help the students critically analyse a *corpus* of comparative urban research papers, reassess and re-think their research objects through the prism of comparative urban studies, and (re)write their research proposal in the perspective of applying for grants and/or doctoral schools. Finally, **fieldwork activities** will rely on a comparative fieldwork approach between the cases of Chiang Mai and Yogyakarta, in close association with the activities developed by the international research network (IRN) « Creating and Mapping the Heritages of the Ordinary City » (CREMA)².

Where and when

The first edition of the UTAB Winter school will be held between **5 to 17 December 2022 in Chiang Mai (from 5 to 9 December) and in Yogyakarta (from 12 to 17 December)**. The multi-sited location is crucial to develop comparative research between the two cities, with the help of the local teams of researchers, lecturers, and urban activists who are also members of the CREMA international network.

How to apply

Three categories of candidates are eligible :

1. PhD students ;
2. Students who hold a master degree and would like to enroll as PhD students ;
3. Master students who would like to enroll as PhD students after completion of their master.

Candidates shall submit their application at the latest on **August 15th 2022**. Successful applicants will be notified on September 15th 2022.

The application file shall be composed by :

- cover letter outlining the student's motivations to attend the UTAB winter school ;
- updated curriculum vitae ;
- research project (between 700 and 1000 words) that the applicant develops / may want to develop during his.her doctoral studies;
- names and email address of 2 referees ;
- copy of master degree or academic transcript (in case the applicant does not yet hold his.her master degree at the time of the application).

The application shall be sent to the following email address : winterschool2022@irasec.com

² CREMA brings together 10 partners (3 French research units, 3 Southeast Asian based universities, 1 urban consulting firm, and 3 associations of the civil societies) in a network that aims to coproduce knowledge about the residential and commercial neighborhoods that compose the ordinary cities in Southeast Asia. CREMA runs from 2022 to 2026 and develops 7 case studies in Southeast Asia. It has received a grant from the INSHS of the CNRS and is coordinated by Adele Esposito Andujar and Nathalie Lancret.

Fellowships for participants

Limited funding is available to sponsor registration fees, trips and daily living costs for students coming from low-income countries.

Registration fees

All successful applicants will have to pay a registration fee **equivalent to 100 euros**. The students who are granted the fellowship will get refunding for the registration fee upon their arrival in Chiang Mai.

If you have questions...

- Do not hesitate to reach out to the scientific coordinators — **Adèle ESPOSITO ANDUJAR and Jérôme Samuel**, if you have any question : winterschool2022@irasec.com
- For further information about the IRASEC doctoral workshops & the UTAB winter schools, kindly visit our Facebook page : <https://www.facebook.com/Winterschool-2022-112961204745272/>.

Lecturers & members of the scientific committee

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